Dom na moczarach

House on the Marsh

ANGIELSKI Z DETEKTYWEM

Felberg SJA

Anna Kowalczyk

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Series Editor: Adam Wolański

Reviewer: *Dariusz Kętla*

Copy editor: *Christopher Smith*

Production editor: *Barbara Gluza*

Cover designer: *Michał Dąbrowski*

DTP: *Krzysztof Świstak*

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CHAPTER 1

THE WALL THREE MILES LONG

Mr. Harry Dickson, Esq.
Baker Street
London

Dear Mr. Dickson,

I'm begging you to help me and my whole family. Somebody has put a curse on all of us and the house of my father. We have already tried everything to stop it but without success. So you are our last hope. Only you can solve this mystery and save us from death.

Robert Riderswood

Harry Dickson received this letter two days ago. He was not very busy and was going to rest for some time but all his plans had to be changed. As a man who enjoyed good health, he used to say that relaxation makes him tired and is more exhausting than the hardest work.

So, after settling his most important matters, he packed his suitcases and left for Norwich.

The letter was sent from a town called Bolton, from the Riderswoods' property, which is situated in the heart of the least-known area of Wash—a land of lakes, mud and swamps.

When Dickson arrived at Norwich, he took the letter out of his pocket and read it once again. He wanted to make sure that the sender's name was Riderswood and to check the address.

Dickson called a taxi.

"We'll go to Bolton!"

"Yes, sir."

The Riderswoods were the biggest landowners in the area so the chauffeur should know them. When Dickson asked him about the family, the chauffeur turned round and looked at the detective with his eyes wide open:

"What? Are you going to the Riderswoods? Is it possible?"

"Why would it be impossible? Why are you so surprised?"

The chauffeur took off his hat:

"Can you see this, sir?" he said. "I have grey hair. I'm already fifty years old. But I have never in my life driven anybody to the Riderswoods. Everybody knows that Lord Riderswood does not allow any visitors in his gloomy house."

Harry Dickson didn't show how much he became interested in this news.

"One day it had to happen. I may be the first visitor there but I hope not the last one. Let's go! First, however, I'd like to stop at an inn in Bolton. I will leave my suitcases there and then we will go directly to the Lord's house."

The chauffeur nodded his head and added, this time with a smile:

"You won't be able to see the house anyway, sir. Only the wall. But I do not believe you have seen such a wall anywhere in the world."

The car was moving fast along the road while Dickson was thinking about the content of the letter. He compared it with information he had received from the chauffeur and said to himself:

"Yes, it is correct . . ."

He took a short nap. He could fall asleep whenever he wanted but

this time it was not a deep sleep.

"Hallo, sir!"

Dickson woke up.

"This is where the wall starts. It is worth seeing. I'll drive slower."

Dickson couldn't believe his eyes. The wall was 25 feet high, plain, and a dirty grey colour. It reminded him of the Santé prison walls on Boulevard Arago in Paris.

"Old Lord Riderswood, father of the present owner, spent nearly all his money on building this wall. All of the members of his family have been strange for generations. The present owner is no different from the others."

The chauffeur was almost proud that he could personally show this most spectacular construction to the detective.

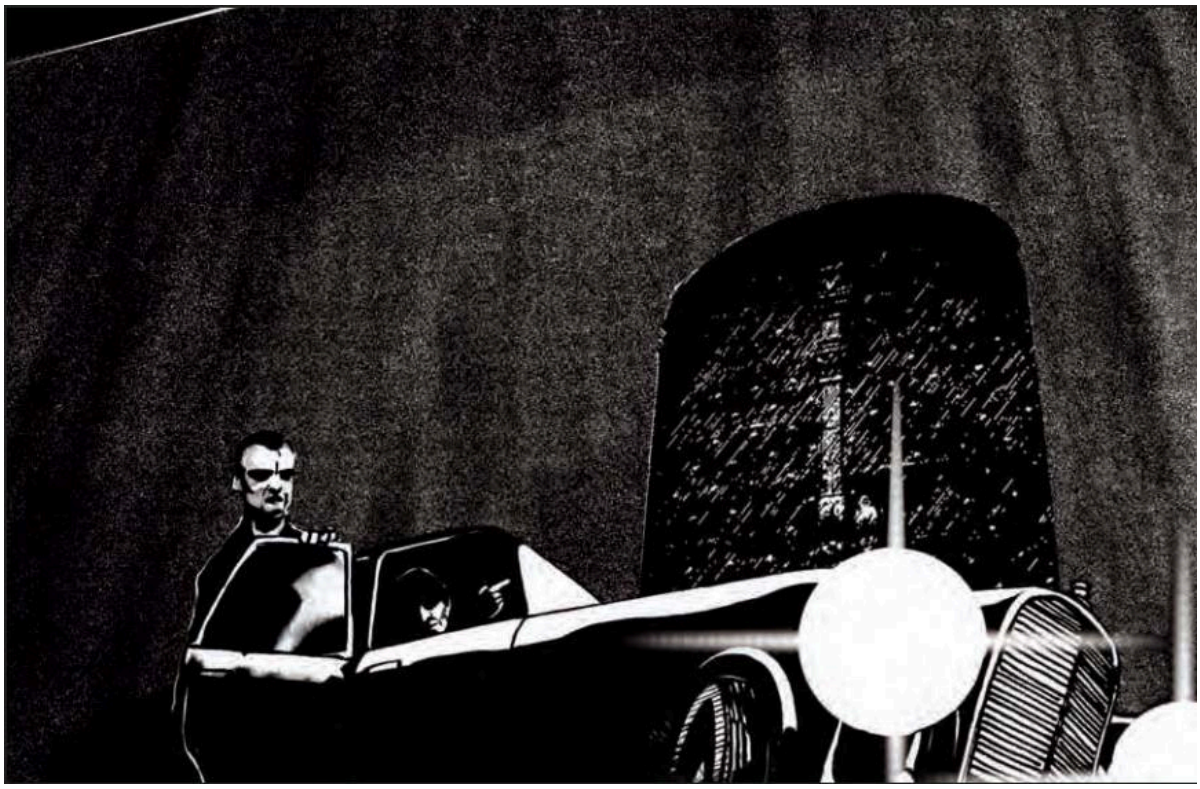
"Three miles of such a wall! Three miles, sir! And just one small entrance. That is how they separated themselves from the outside world."

Dickson was indeed surprised. But despite that fact, he preferred to go a bit faster.

They arrived at a massive gate, which looked like an entrance to a Medieval fortress.

Dickson was looking for a door-bell when a small door in the gate dating from the end of the 5th opened and a young man looked out. He was breathing fast and to the 15th century seemed to be a little scared.

"Are you Mr. Dickson? Yes, I can recognise you. I've seen you in thousands of photographs in magazines. I'm Robert Riderswood. I was afraid to go out to meet you, so I waited on top of a tall tree."



"Three miles of such a wall! Three miles, sir! And just one small entrance. That is how they separated themselves from the outside world."

"Well, that's an interesting way of waiting for a guest who has received a special invitation," replied the detective.

"I wrote to you when I felt really desperate and frightened. To tell you the truth, I started regretting it soon after sending the letter. I was even hoping that you would not listen to my call for help. But now, since you are here, let's see what's going to happen."

Robert Riderswood looked really afraid. His head was enormously big in comparison with his body. He was a bit bent and slim, with skinny hands. He was about 30 years old and dressed casually.

"I haven't thought yet how to explain your arrival to my father. He does not invite any guests. The opinion of my two older brothers is more important to him than mine, but they don't like guests, either. I really don't know."

"You will tell your father that we met on the road."

"But you will not mention my letter, will you?" Riderswood interrupted.

"Don't worry about that . . ."

"Thank you! You are a real gentleman. You are also a great detective and I'm sure you'll be able to solve this mystery. Tell my father and brothers that we met in front of the house and that you came here all by yourself, please. And find some good reason for your visit because my father will certainly ask about it."

Robert Riderswood pushed open the door.

Dickson nearly shouted in amazement as they entered a real jungle, not just a park surrounding the house.

"Does anybody take care of this park?"

"Yes, in the past . . . Today this wood is like a second wall around the house. Further on it is better."

They walked on faded leaves and broken branches until they came to a lawn, which was as big as a meadow. A few sheep were eating grass there.

In a distance they could see the house. It looked more like a castle but had no style and was rather gloomy and ugly.

"Here is our house. I hope you have come up with some explanation. My father has already seen you from his window and he will come here in a minute. He might be angry and even ask you to leave."

Robert put his head down and became silent. A huge man with a long silver beard appeared at the door leading to the house. Lord Riderswood was observing the detective in an unfriendly way.

"Do I have the honour to speak to the Lord of the Riderswood Valley?"

"Yes, it's me. How can I help you, sir? Who are you?"

"I am Harry Dickson. Have you ever heard about me, my Lord?"

"Yes, I have. I know you are a famous detective. What are you looking for in my house?"

"The matter that brings me here has nothing to do with you personally. But would you be so kind to speak to me in private, please?"

Dickson sounded self-confident. The Lord showed him the way in, looking at the same time at Robert with real anger.

"I met this gentleman on the road," said the young Riderswood.

"I'm not asking about anything, so please keep quiet," the Lord criticised his son.

The detective and the host entered the library.

"I'm all ears, Mr. Dickson."

"Have you ever seen the military map of this area, my Lord? The map of the mud and swamps of the Wash district?"

"I believe I have. So?"

"I'm sure you have noticed that a lot of details are missing from the map. I am here on behalf of the military authorities. The map needs to be corrected as soon as possible. We are mostly interested in the area close to your property."

"What do you require from me then?"

"Nothing. I'm just asking you to let me stay on your property for a couple of days."

"No strangers have ever stayed here. But since it's a question of national security, I cannot object. Where are your suitcases?"

"At the Two Crosses Inn in Bolton."

"My gardener Soames will bring them. From now on you are my guest."

"Thank you very much, my Lord. Here are my documents from the London Police."

"It's not necessary. I've seen you in photographs. I will order my servants to prepare a room for you. We have dinner at 7.

And we go to bed rather early. During dinner I will introduce you to the other members of my family."

The Lord pulled a rope with an old-fashioned bell. A pale and poorlooking servant appeared after a while.

"Topkins," said the Lord, "this gentleman will stay with us for some time. Take him to the pink room and assist him with whatever he needs."

Topkins was so amazed that he opened his mouth wide. But then he bowed and said:

"Yes, my Lord. Could you follow me, sir?"

They passed a few dark rooms, walked through two long corridors and went upstairs to the first floor.

The pink room was located at the end of the left wing of the house. A large pond with reeds on its banks could be seen from the window. There were beautiful white lilies on the surface of water.

"I'm afraid," said Topkins, "that the noise made by frogs will disturb you during the night. But the room is comfortable and high above the ground. I'll make a fire in a minute."

"Thank you, Topkins. I hope we'll be satisfied with each other."

A pleasant smile appeared on the servant's face:

"I will try to serve you as well as I can. I am very happy that finally somebody is visiting this place."

"Would you like a cigarette?"

"A cigarette? . . . With pleasure. But I will keep it for later and smoke it in the evening when the others can't see me."

"Who are the others? Servants?"

"Yes, sir. But please don't tell anybody."

"You can count on me. I'll keep it a secret, Topkins. In the evening, when you come to my room, we will have a glass of whisky. Is that all right?"

Poor Topkins was so touched that Dickson thought he would start crying in a moment. But the Lord's servant did not reply, just bowed and went out of the room.

Dickson refreshed himself a bit and, because there was still half an hour left before dinner, he sat down in an armchair and smoked a pipe of his favourite tobacco "Navy Cut".

The pond, which he could see through the window, was as narrow as a river. There were several islands on it.

The park did not actually look as bad as he had thought at the beginning. He even noticed a few white sculptures.

It was quiet. The detective was in a strange mood created by the huge wall, the pond and the gloomy house. He felt that there was some mystery behind it and he was happy to be a part of it. He was preparing for some adventures, he was ready for dangers, he was like a hunter setting off for a chase.

Suddenly . . .

Dickson heard something—a bird or . . . The tone of the voice was getting stronger, it was becoming more human, more . . . womanly. The silence of the pond and the wood was broken. Somebody was singing. The melody was short but full of longing. It stopped as unexpectedly as it had begun.

Dickson straightened up his tie and put down the pipe. He heard the bell calling everybody for dinner.

CHAPTER 2

A STRANGE NIGHT

The dining room was lit by a great number of bronze chandeliers, which showed how rich the host was but at the same time they proved that he had no taste.

"Miss Louise Addison—my niece," the Lord started presenting the people living in his house. "Miss Sophy Winsham—her governess . . . My older son Hugo . . . My son Michael . . . You have met Robert already."

All the looks directed at Dickson were more curious than friendly. Miss Addison didn't even seem to notice him. She was a pretty girl but she looked sick. Only the governess smiled at him, the way spinsters do.

They sat down and started eating. The food was wonderful, but the atmosphere was cold.

Dickson noticed that when the host ordered wine, all the members of his family looked at one another truly surprised. The whole family appeared to be teetotalers.

The Lord had already informed his sons that Dickson was going to stay for a few days and hunt on their property.

"You won't have to leave our park in order to shoot several interesting animals," said Hugo Riderswood. "It's enough to step out of the house and you'll see a lot of birds. There are too many pheasants, partridges and rabbits in the neighbourhood. To tell you the truth, the hunting season has not started yet, but here, behind the wall, we don't have to obey all the rules."

The conversation about hunting continued. Hugo Riderswood seemed to have much knowledge on the subject.

"Are you a hunter?" Dickson asked him.

"Me?" the Lord's oldest son was surprised. "Oh, no! I'm disgusted by it. I'm afraid of blood."

Michael shrugged his shoulders as if not happy with this answer.

"My brother is too sensitive. He exaggerates . . ."

"So maybe you will accompany me tomorrow?"

"I'm afraid not. I do not approve of killing, just like all the members of our family."

Dickson was really amazed with this reply.

"There are plenty of animals around. This area is like a paradise for hunters and none of you takes a rifle and goes to the woods? Do you at least have a dog that I could take with me?"

This simple question had an incredible impact on the listeners.

Hugo's lips started trembling as if it had frightened him very much. Michael, on the other hand, nearly shouted:

"A dog?!" but he calmed down and said quietly:

"You can't find any dogs here."

For a while everybody was silent and then the Lord said:

"You have to forgive us. Indeed we do not have any dogs. Actually, we don't like them at all. Soames will help you tomorrow. There are so many animals here that a dog is not necessary."

The atmosphere at the table had already been cold at the beginning, now it became unbearable. Therefore, the dinner ended quite fast.

"I hope you will soon go to bed," said the Lord, getting up and leaving the table. "We don't stay up for too long. Good night, sir!"

His words sounded like an order. Miss Addison, when Dickson wished her good night, nodded her head slightly rudely.

When the detective entered his room, the fire was already burning. He lit his pipe and sat in the armchair near the window. A cold wind was blowing from the pond. It was quiet.

Suddenly, somebody knocked at his door. After a while he saw Topkins's head.

"I'm here," said the servant, rather embarrassed.

"Whisky is waiting for you, Topkins," said Dickson pouring the drink into two glasses.

Topkins eyes started glowing:

"This is living!"

"Don't you ever drink alcohol?"

"Never! The Lord has forbidden it. We were shocked when he ordered wine during dinner."

"Another glass?"

"You are very kind," said Topkins, taking the second glass. "How long are you going to stay here, sir?"

"I don't know yet. It will depend on how successful my hunting is."

"Have you really come here to hunt?"

"Is it indeed so improbable?"

"No, that's not what I meant. I would just like it to be true . . ."

"Why not? Drink some more, I still have one more bottle and, if necessary, I will buy another one at the Two Crosses Inn in Bolton."

"It's a very good inn. But we are not allowed to go there."

"Who doesn't allow you?"

"The host, and Soames watches us."

"He must be a very strong man, this Soames."

Topkins looked at the door with fear.

"I hope he's not going to find out that I have been here. I'll tell you something more," he whispered. "We are not allowed

to go outside the wall."

"That's very strange. You don't believe that I have come here to hunt, although there are so many birds in the neighbourhood. You mustn't go out. You mustn't invite guests. You mustn't drink. Only secrets. Can't you explain at least one of them to me, Topkins?"

Topkins became pale. He shrank as if expecting to be hit. He tiptoed to Dickson and said very quietly:

"I can't tell you anything because I want to stay alive. And don't ask anybody here about it. Each of us has a fatal secret . . . But if you really have come here to hunt, not to court Miss Louise, it's good. It's very good."

Topkins sneaked out of the room.

Dickson started getting ready to sleep. He took a look at his suitcase and realised immediately that somebody had searched it. That person hadn't even tried to hide the fact.

Who could be interested in the content of his suitcase? Topkins and Soames were busy at the table. There were no other male servants.The cook and the maid were working in the kitchen preparing the meal. He was sure that it had been somebody from the family, maybe even the Lord himself.

The silence of the room was suddenly interrupted by the noise of banging and snorting. He became nervous and tried to find out where these sounds were coming from, so he stopped in the middle of the room and started listening.

He was sure that somebody was moving under his window, as if digging in the ground . . .

After a while the noise became louder. He hid behind a curtain and placed a small lamp in such a way that he could see what was going on behind the window but he was not seen from the outside.

Meanwhile, the moon appeared in the sky and lit the park and the pond. Dickson leaned out of the window, trying to be as careful as he could.

But he moved back immediately when he saw two eyes glowing in the dark. At the same time he heard furious growling. A huge red dog jumped in his direction. It couldn't reach Dickson's window but it could smell a stranger, therefore it kept walking around and sniffing.

Dickson called the dog to make it less angry. The result was the opposite, however. The dog started barking loudly.

Trembles ran down Dickson's body.

"Meeting that dog face-to-face is not something I would wish on anybody," he said to himself. "And Lord Riderswood claims that there are no dogs here . . . Anyway, I always have to remember to keep my pistol loaded."

It was 11 o'clock. Dickson went to bed and soon fell asleep.

●●●

He was woken up by a gentle gust of wind. He remembered though that he had closed the window before going to sleep. Dickson sat on his bed not making any noise.

He heard the curtains flapping in the wind. Unfortunately, the blinds were covered and as a result no light came into the room. It was completely dark.

He heard some steps. They were rather quiet, as if somebody were walking on the carpet in slippers.

Someone's hand moved something on the marble table. He felt it all rather than heard it.

After a moment—again footsteps, this time much closer to his bed.

Dickson reached out his arm and suddenly touched a big naked shoulder.

But at the same time something so incredible happened that even Dickson was not able to stand it. A horrible howling was heard and somebody pulled down the curtains and the blinds, and jumped out of the window.

It wasn't dark anymore, the moon was glowing. The detective heard the two brothers and the Lord.

"What's happened?" called the Lord.

Somebody knocked at his door. Hugo and Michael came in. They were wearing their pyjamas.

"Are you all right, sir?"

"Yes, I'm fine. A sudden gust of wind has broken the window," Dickson lied, "and it created a horrible noise. And a dog howled."

"Haven't you seen anything?"

"No, I haven't. What was I supposed to see? Do you have any suspicions?"

"Are you all right, sir?"

"Yes, I'm fine. A sudden gust of wind has broken the window," Dickson lied.

The brothers looked meaningfully at each other.

"No, no. We don't know anything. We are so sorry, sir."

The Lord himself came in. He seemed to be happy that the guest felt fine. He went out very fast, putting an end to the event. Hugo Riderswood left as well.

Dickson remained in the room only with Michael.

"Maybe you should go to sleep in my room," the host's son suggested.

"No, thank you. I'll stay here. It's already past 3 a.m. Anyway, I'm not going to sleep any more. If you want to accompany me, we'd better go downstairs to the dining room and have some cognac."

"Cognac? . . . My father doesn't allow us to drink. But he's probably asleep now. All right, I'll go with you."

The young Riderswood drank two glasses. He was sitting at the table in his pyjamas unbuttoned on top.

Dickson had noticed that both brothers were wearing strange collars covering their necks completely. Now on Riderswood's naked chest and neck the detective saw wide and deep scars.

"I wonder," said Dickson, "what beast you have been fighting with that now you have such awful scars?"

Michael Riderswood jumped up and covered his wounds. He became pale and begged the detective:

"Don't tell anybody that you have seen this. I would definitely be lost forever. Nothing would save me."

"Was it a dog?" Dickson thought about the dog he had seen under his window.

Riderswood answered:

"Don't ask me about anything. I'm begging you. When you arrived here, I had at first a crazy idea that you would save us. But now . . . Now I'm afraid you will be the cause of our death. Yours too . . ."

"Could I help you with anything?"

"No, at least not now. Don't give me any more cognac. I'll lose the rest of my senses."

"Well, whatever you want. I can't force you to trust me. But do you really believe that the wind, no matter how strong, could break the glass in my window and pull down the curtains? All of you believed in it as if you were looking for any, however unsuitable, explanation."

"I didn't believe your words even for a moment. But don't ask me about this, either."

"Is anybody in this house in danger?"

"So far not."

"Why so far? You have to give me an answer."

"Because there is nobody courting Miss Addison."

Dickson rose from his armchair:

"Is jealousy the reason for everything that is happening in this house?"

Michael denied energetically:

"Oh no, sir! Not at all! But you must know one thing. Anybody who looks at her—dies. It's not jealousy, it's a curse . . . I've told you too much. I gave you a proof of how much I trust you."

"Just one more word: have any people died in this house in strange circumstances?"

"Yes, they have. Two of my brothers and their friend, who fell in love with Miss Louise at first sight."

"And what about you?"

The detective pointed to the scars on Michael's chest.

"Me? . . . No, I'm not in danger. I just want to live, nothing more."

"Michael," said Dickson, "I've come here as a guest but I'll stay as a detective."

"I know. It's Robert who has brought you here. He's the most cunning of us all. I think he loves Miss Addison."

CHAPTER 3

THE PRISONER

Despite the night full of unexpected and unpleasant events, the days following it were calm and even monotonous. Dickson hunted. The cook didn't know what to do with his prey.

One day, after a successful hunt, the detective asked the Lord to suggest one of the neighbours to whom he could give some animals.

"We live alone. You have noticed it yourself. The only person we keep in touch with is Mr. Wardleton, who lives in a small house about three miles from here, near Bolton. Perhaps you might offer some of your prey to him."

"I was going to visit Bolton anyway in order to do some shopping," Dickson replied. "I have to send a few letters, too."

He thought first of all about a letter to his assistant Tom Wills.

He noticed also that when the name of Mr. Wardleton was mentioned, everybody moved and Michael Riderswood looked at him with fear in his eyes.

Dickson expected that young Riderswood would like to talk to him. In the evening Michael knocked at his door.

"Are you going to Bolton?"

"Yes, I am."

"To Mr. Wardleton?"

"Yes. I'll take him a few animals which I have hunted. I'll also give him your father's regards."

Michael laughed:

"He won't believe you. You'd better tell him at the beginning that the gifts are from you."

"Why wouldn't he believe it? What kind of man is he?"

Young Riderswood didn't say anything.

"Michael," said Dickson, putting both of his hands on the man's shoulders, "a few days ago you showed me that you trust me. Why can't you tell me the truth now?"

For the second time on that day fear appeared on Michael's face.

"All right. I'll try to be as sincere with you as I can. I want to save you but I can't do it at my own expense . . . Please, try to understand me . . . And don't condemn me . . ."

Tears ran down his face.

"Calm down. I believe that you'll tell me as much as you can. Or at least that you'll try to hide as little as possible."

Michael regained control over his body and suddenly asked a question not connected with what they had been talking about:

"Have you talked to Miss Addison?"

Dickson became angry because of this question.

"What a strange house! . . . Do I have to fall in love with this silent and proud girl? You know very well that I haven't even exchanged a word with her."

"Why then are they sending you to Mr. Wardleton?"

"Nobody is sending me to him. I asked the Lord myself whom I could give the prey to. Does Wardleton have anything to do with Miss Louise?"

"Quiet! . . . For goodness' sake, be quiet! . . . They are only waiting for such an occasion—it is certain . . ."

Dickson seemed to understand everything now:

"Did your two brothers and their friend die in the castle?"

Michael moved one step backwards.

"In the castle? No, not at all. Don't forget that we are horribly afraid of blood."

"So, who is Mr. Wardleton?"

"I don't know. But I know for sure that we have to be afraid of him. I'm warning you against him. Tomorrow, when you are free, don't go to Mr. Wardleton, run away! Go back to the city, to London."

Dickson was struck by one word:

"When I am free? . . . What do you mean? Am I a prisoner here?"

"Yes, you are. They don't let you feel like a prisoner but if only you wanted to go out without my father's permission, you would find out that it's impossible. Soames is supposed to accompany you tomorrow. Without him my father won't let you out. You must take him to the inn, make him drunk with rum and then escape."

"Doesn't your father realise that I could do it?"

"Yes, he does. He's even counting on it and that's how he's giving you the possibility to run away."

"Who may try to kill me here? And for what?"

"Don't you really think about Miss Addison?"

"I've already told you that I don't."

"And you are not in love with her?"

Dickson became irritated.

"Stop it finally. Don't you exaggerate with this princess?"

"Well, if this is true," said Michael with self-confidence, "can you explain why you had a curl of her hair in your suitcase?"

The detective couldn't believe his ears. Matters got really complicated.

"Oh, so it's the second time when somebody has looked through the things in my suitcase. Listen to me: first, somebody searched my luggage in order to put this curl of her hair into it, and then once again the suitcase was opened to find the hair there. The person who found it had put it inside as well."

"What are you talking about?"

"I can guarantee that I know nothing about her hair. But even

if I were in love with this girl, I would never keep her hair in my belongings. Where would I get it from anyway? The only explanation is that someone wants to compromise her . . ."

"You are wrong. You are not able to judge the situation properly.

Nobody wants to compromise her. They just want you to die."

"Who? The Lord?"

"No, not him. He wants to save you. That's why he has agreed to your visit at Mr. Wardleton's, to give you a chance to escape."

"Why didn't the Lord tell me everything at the beginning? Why doesn't anybody explain it to me?"

The younger Riderswood became angry:

"Because it's not possible. Not possible! Do you understand?"

Dickson was looking for a moment at Michael but he could see that the man wouldn't say anything more.

"Good night, Michael. See you tomorrow."

"Good night. Don't go tomorrow to Mr. Wardleton. I'm asking you, sir!"

"I'll think about it. But I'm not a man who gives something up halfway through."

The night was calm.

●●●

For the first time Dickson was in the big dining room all by himself waiting for breakfast. Nobody else was there and the table was laid for only one person. Tea was served by Soames, not as usual by Topkins.

"Soames," said the detective, "we'll go together today to Bolton."

"I'm afraid," the servant replied, "that we will not go to Bolton today. I won't be able to accompany you, sir."

"Well, I'll go alone then."

"The horses will not be available, sir. And the prey has already been delivered to Mr. Wardleton."

"So I'll walk."

"Lord Riderswood ordered me to take you to the part of our land where there are lots of birds. He wishes you good hunting."

"I'll hunt tomorrow. Today I'm going to Bolton."

"No, sir."

"What?"

"I said no."

"Should I assume that I'm your prisoner?

"You may say so, sir."

"I'd like to see the Lord."

"It's impossible."

"So one of his sons."

"I'm afraid I cannot fulfil this request, either. And now, if you have finished your breakfast, please follow me."

Dickson got up and went towards his rifle standing in the corner of the room.

"I must warn you that you won't be able to hunt unless you give me your word that you will not use this weapon against any person living in this house, especially against your servant."

"Against my prison guard, to be more precise."

"You said so, sir."

"I prefer not to hunt at all in such conditions."

"Very well, sir. Now follow me please."

"Am I not allowed to stay in the castle?"

"A correct guess. From now on you'll be living in the guesthouse at the other end of the park and I'll have the honour of serving you."

"I don't understand much of what is going on here but for the time being I'm giving in. Are you aware of the fact that you are depriving me of freedom and can be prosecuted for this?"

"Yes, I know, sir."

Suddenly Dickson burst into laughter.

"What about my pistol? You have forgotten about it."

"You can keep it, sir. There are no bullets inside."

"You haven't missed anything."

"Thank you for your appreciation."

They walked through the wildest part of the park until they reached a meadow close to the pond. Dickson saw a little house, quite nice at first sight. It was comfortably furnished so he was even pleased with the change. Only the bars in the windows reminded him of the fact that he was a prisoner now. Also the sound of the door being locked by Soames showed him how different his situation was now.

He was a prisoner . . . but only for a moment.

Dickson took out of his pocket something which looked like a cigarette lighter. He pressed one button and suddenly the lid came off presenting a set of bullets underneath. Then, from another pocket, he took out a fountain pen. He moved something at the bottom of the pen and one part of it became longer—it was a file made of the best quality steel.

He was a prisoner . . . but only for a moment.

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Two days later a telephone rang in the detective's house in Baker Street in London.

Tom Wills was away from home but the housekeeper Mrs. Crown answered the phone.

Actually, it kept ringing so often during the host's absence that Mrs. Crown had a ready-made answer. This time she also picked up the phone and said:

"Mr. Dickson is not at home."

She wanted to hang up but a pleasant voice on the other side replied:

"It's OK. I wanted to talk to Mr. Wills."

Mrs. Crown had been expecting her boss to come back soon. She was preparing his favourite pudding and now she had to take it out of the oven so she didn't have time for any conversations.

"Mr. Wills is absent, too," she said sharply.

But the caller didn't give up.

"This is Mrs. Crown, isn't it? So could you tell Mr. Wills that Mr. Dickson asked me to give him his regards."

This news surprised the housekeeper:

"How is it possible that you give regards to him and not to me? Aren't you wrong?"

She heard laughter:

"Of course the regards are for you, too. He wanted me to give them to all the people in his house."

This answer satisfied Mrs. Crown.

"If you say so, then thank you. How is he? Where is he?"

"He's fine. He asked me to tell you as well that he would stay for one more week . . ."

"What?" the housekeeper interrupted. "What about my pudding?"

"Pudding? . . . You'll eat it yourselves."

"And who are you, sir?"

"It doesn't matter."

The person hesitated:

"My name is Yardley. I'm Mr. Dickson's friend. Good bye."

The man finished the conversation quite fast. Mrs. Crown would have liked to continue but the connection was broken.

As soon as Tom Wills entered the house at Baker Street, the housekeeper informed him about the phone call. She did it in her own way.

"We will have to eat the pudding all by ourselves," she said rather depressed. "Mr. Dickson is not coming today, either."

"How do you know?"

"A gentleman called. He's Mr. Dickson's friend named Yardley. He gave us his regards and said that the boss would be back in one week."

Tom asked her to repeat the whole conversation. Mrs. Crown, who liked to talk but only when she wanted, not when she was

asked to do so, was a bit irritated but repeated everything as well as she remembered.

After a few minutes of listening Tom decided to make an appointment with Mr. Goldfield from Scotland Yard.

"You see," Dickson's assistant explained, "this caller is a very intriguing man. Do you know any Mr. Yardley? . . . Have you ever heard about a friend, or at least an acquaintance of Mr. Dickson who has such a name? . . . You have known each other for many years."

Mr. Goldfield, as usual when he was thinking about something deeply, rubbed his chin.

"No," he said after a while, "I don't know anybody named Yardley."

"I don't know anybody, either. So what is the conclusion?"

"The conclusion is easy. This Mr. Yardley must be a person who actually has a different name."

"Don't you think that if we continue analysing, we will have to admit that Mr. Yardley is an enemy and that he called only to make us stop worrying about Mr. Dickson."

"Well, if that was indeed the reason for his call," the inspector remarked, "he is not a clever person. Why didn't he guess that we would analyse the whole situation?"

"He probably thought it was worth trying. He knew that we haven't received any letters from Mr. Dickson and that in a few days we would start searching for him. He assumed that if we believed him, he would get more time, which might be extremely precious for him."

Goldfield rubbed his chin again:

"This man must be in touch with Mr. Dickson. He knows that Harry wasn't able to send any letters to us and that's why he contacted us on his behalf."

Tom was so worried that he couldn't sit patiently in the armchair in the inspector's office. He got up and said in a trembling voice:

"My boss is in serious danger. We have to save him!"

The inspector looked at his watch.

"The train to Norwich leaves in two hours."

He pressed a button on his phone and gave a few orders. Tom wasn't listening to what the inspector was saying but he understood that he was getting ready for a trip and it made him extremely happy.

"Let's go! We'll take some people with us. Spotlights, too. We're going to the land of mud and swamps. We'll be looking for Mr. Dickson in the area of Wash."

That evening they were travelling on an express train in the direction of Norwich.

CHAPTER 4

A NEW PRISONER

For two days Dickson didn't have any reason to complain about his prison. Anyway, he could escape at any time. He had even sawed through the bars in order to be able to go out through the window if it turned out to be necessary. But now he preferred to do nothing and to see how the situation was going to develop. Soames was a careful servant and a good cook, too. He helped the detective to fish and was surprisingly polite.

On the third day, in the afternoon, Dickson saw a shadow in the window with the bars. Soon he realised that it was Miss Louise Addison.

Dickson removed the bars and opened the window.

"How can I help you, Miss?"

"Why aren't you running away?" the young woman asked.

"It's too early. I need to stay here to figure out a few things."

"Do you know that meanwhile Hugo and Michael are preparing

a plan of escape for you? That's why I've come here. Save them, please.

You can't expect such a sacrifice from them."

Dickson took out the remaining bars and climbed out through the window.

"You're a brave man," the young woman said with admiration. "Run after me, we don't have a minute to spare."

They were running towards water, in the direction of the castle.

Suddenly, they heard a loud order:

"Hugo! Look out!"

The detective recognised Michael's voice. As soon as Miss Louise, who was running first, heard it, she waved at Dickson to run faster.

After a while they came to the bank of the pond. Dickson saw a boat.

Hugo Riderswood was standing in it trying to keep his balance. He was maneuvering with a big oar. You could guess that he was getting ready for a fight with some unknown and invisible enemy.

Dickson noticed that enemy soon. The head of the red dog which had tried to get into his room on the first night could be seen above the surface of the lake. If poor Hugo didn't hit the beast at first attempt, he would be lost! **Hugo was getting**

ready for a fight with some unknown and invisible enemy.

Louise and the detective, with their hearts beating very fast, were waiting for this incredible fight between a man and a bloodthirsty animal to begin.

Young Riderswood took a swing at the dog but he missed and the oar touched only water. The boat rocked and they thought for a moment that Hugo would fall into the water. In order to keep his balance he had to drop the oar.

"He'll die!" Louise cried terrified.

"No!" shouted the detective reaching for his pistol.

He shot twice. The beast, hit in the head, howled horribly and jumped up from the water. But in the next second it fell down heavily. The dog disappeared under the surface of the pond.

"You killed . . ." Louise whispered, ". . . you killed the red wolf. What are we going to do now? What is going to happen to us?"

Hugo and his brother, instead of thanking the detective, were also terrified.

"Would you prefer to die in the fangs of this awful wolf, not even a dog as I have just learnt?"

"You don't realise what it means for us. Blood was spilt in the area of the castle. Save yourself at least! Run away from this place, from this land, go back to London! I worry about you and about all of us!"

Louise begged Dickson to leave them alone.

"All right, I'll go but only with all of you. Somebody must put an end to this nightmare in which you are living."

Dickson's words had a huge impact on the three listeners. Hugo and Michael at first became excited but then stepped back resigned. Louise withdrew immediately.

"No," she said, looking at both men. "It's impossible. We mustn't go outside the wall. We don't want to. Do you understand? But you should hurry. The enemy is close."

"I still have four bullets. Don't be afraid. We are not in danger."

"Do you want to kill again? And again blood will be spilt? We will be lost for sure."

In this moment something horrible happened.

Louise, who was looking at the water, red with blood, made a strange sound, between a laugh and a howl.

"Blood! Blood!" she cried, pushed the two men away and ran into the water. She was swimming in it with a pleasant smile on her face.

"You must run. You can't stay here even for a second longer."

There was so much power and strength in Michael's voice that Dickson couldn't disobey him.

"I've got a rope. Let's go to the wall."

The three men started running. When they were close to the wall, they heard an order:

"Stop!"

It was Soames approaching them with a huge club in his hand.

"Put your hands up!" Dickson ordered.

But instead of obeying the detective's order, Soames put the hand with the club down.

The detective shot and the club fell out of the servant's hand. He shouted with pain.

"You should thank me Soames that I pointed at your arm, not your head. I was perfectly entitled even to kill you."

Hugo and Michael took care of the wounded servant.

"We will stay with him," said Hugo, "and you should finally get out of this hell."

After five minutes the detective was on the road to Bolton. When he saw the first buildings, he also heard the noise of a horse-drawn carriage behind him. Dickson had just enough

time to hide in the hedge next to the road. It was Robert Riderswood riding in the carriage as fast as he could.

From the first meeting at the gate, Dickson had not seen the man at all. He had been sick. That at least is what the detective had been told.

And now—he was healthy again.

Observing the carriage, the detective noticed that instead of going directly to the town Robert turned right into a sand road.

"I wonder," Dickson said to himself, "where this gentleman is going.

As far as I know there are only swamps."

Feeling curious Dickson also turned right and followed the tracks of the carriage. He was walking slowly and carefully, even though there was nothing around that could suggest he was in danger.

It was getting dark. He heard one of Robert's horses neighing.

Finally, up on the hill, he saw a house or actually a hut. It was for sure Wardleton's house.

Once again Dickson heard a horse neighing and then silence.

He went around the whole house. On one side there was no access to it because it was surrounded by swamps. But somehow he managed to get closer. The carriage had disappeared and it was very quiet inside the house.

Dickson found a hole in the hedge, went through it, came closer to the hut and, with a pistol in his hand, opened the door.

One of the boards in the floor was broken so it creaked when he stepped on it. At the same moment he heard a weak voice:

"Is that you Mr. Robert? I'm begging you to let me go! Let me live . . . Mr. Robert, have mercy, please!"

The detective recognised the voice.

"Topkins, what is going on here? Who has imprisoned you?"

"Is that Mr. Dickson? Why have you come here? Have they brought you just like me?"

"No, I've come to set you free, Topkins. Where are you?"

"In the basement. But Mr. Robert promised to set me free. Maybe you should wait for him?"

"Robert has just been here. But he probably forgot about you, poor Topkins. Let me see what I can do."

Dickson switched on an electric torch and came down to the basement. Topkins was sitting on the floor with handcuffs on his wrists.

Not paying attention to the servant's worries concerning the youngest Riderswood, he took out a file and started sawing the handcuffs. After a few minutes they were able to leave the basement. And then Dickson noticed with horror a deep bleeding wound on Topkins's neck.

"Who's hurt you? How?"

Topkins was surprised by the question.

"Nothing's happened to me," he mumbled. "I hurt myself when I was trying to set myself free."

"You're lying, my friend. These are bite marks. Have you bitten your neck and chest yourself? Who has done it? Tell me!" Dickson felt that now he was close to solving the mystery which he had been thinking about for the last few days. "Tell me! Who has bitten you?"

"Don't ask me about anything! . . . And don't set me free! There is no freedom for me. I must be there behind the wall! Otherwise . . ."

Suddenly Dickson understood everything.

"Otherwise . . . you will have to go back to the prison in Larkmoor, to the prison which is situated on the other side of the swamps. To the prison which you have escaped from—you, Soames and perhaps other Riderswood servants. That's it! Talk to me! I promise I'll do my best to help you not to go back to

Larkmoor. Tell me who has bitten you. Tell me what is going on in the Lord's house."

Dickson grabbed the body of the prisoner and started shaking him. He was also pointing a torch at him. They were standing with their sides turned to the window.

Suddenly, Dickson had an impression that his torch exploded. At the same time he heard the sound of a shot and breaking glass, and he felt Topkins's dead body falling onto the floor.

CHAPTER 5

A BLOODY SECRET

Harry Dickson was running as fast as he could.

He didn't see or hear anything but he could feel the enemy following him. After a few yards the danger became clear—six bullets nearly hit him and the sound of heavy footsteps was getting closer and closer. When he looked back, he saw a huge silhouette coming out of the fog.

Dickson shot.

A horrifying inhuman howl was heard—similar to the one from the first night in the castle.

Dickson kept running. He felt that soon he would have no more power, that he would fall down in the mud and that the beast would catch him. He was stumbling over branches on the ground and falling into the swamp. He realised that there was only death waiting for him on the marsh.

Where to run? . . . Where to hide? . . . He saw some bushes in the distance. This was a good hiding place.

But he stopped suddenly completely resigned as he heard some voices and noticed a strange beam of light. He was lost! They were looking for him with the help of spotlights!

He made up his mind. He went confidently towards the light. They would find him anyway . . .

"Stand still or I'll shoot!"

He tried to threaten them with his pistol, hoping that they might get scared.

"Don't shoot, sir!"

Was he dreaming? It was Tom Wills's voice.

They greeted each other. Inspector Goldfield also shook his hand.

Dickson had been right. Wills turned out to be much more helpful staying in London than coming here with him. But now he had arrived just in time!

"Two Crosses Inn is just one mile away from here. You definitely must drink some hot grog after running through the swamps."

Dickson didn't want to stop working on the mystery but he knew that he needed to recover after recent events.

A nice small room in the inn in Bolton seemed to the detective to be the most wonderful place on Earth.

When he drank a few glasses of hot grog, he called the owner:

"I guess you know nearly everybody in the neighbourhood. Can you tell me who Mr. Wardleton living in the hut nearby is?"

The owner opened his eyes wide, surprised:

"Wardleton? . . . Many years ago, as I have heard, he lived in this area but he left or died a long time ago. His hut is empty, nobody lives there."

"Where do I find the registry books from this area?"

"It's not a problem. I've got them. I am also the local registrar here. osoba odpowiedzialna za

My name is Nathaniel Trent."

"Oh, that's perfect. Can you tell me exactly who lives in Lord Riderswood's house?"

"I don't know these people. A few years ago Soames came here, got drunk and that's all. He's a quiet and sad man. I don't know anything about the others."

"Can you show me the registry books?"

Thick books were brought and put on the table. Dickson looked through their yellowed pages.

Suddenly, very surprised he turned to Goldfield:

"Do you remember Natasha Diershwin? . . . Think hard, my friend, search your memory . . ."

The inspector frowned and rubbed his chin.

"Well, . . . yes. I think I remember something."

"We will know everything soon. Mr. Trent, do you have a phone here? Can you connect me with the head of the Larkmoor prison, please?"

They didn't have to wait too long for the connection.

"It's Harry Dickson speaking. I'm calling you also on behalf of Inspector Goldfield from Scotland Yard. Can you tell me if there were numerous escapes from your prison in the last couple of years?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

"Have you ever caught the fugitives?"

"The search wasn't successful."

"I believe that tomorrow within one day you will be able to make up for this failure. I would just like you to send me here twelve armed guards. Is it possible?"

"Of course, you can count on me."

"Thank you. See you tomorrow, then. The mystery will be solved," said Dickson, looking through the window onto Lord Riderswood's property.

●●●

The detective and his two friends were finishing their breakfast when they heard a group of marching soldiers. They were armed with pistols, rifles and rubber sticks.

"I hope," said Dickson loading his pistol with bullets, "that we won't have to spill even one drop of blood."

The commander of the soldiers reported to Dickson.

"First, we will go to the house on the swamps, and then to the Lord's castle."

At the entrance to the hut they found Topkins's body.

"Tad Butler!" one of the guards shouted. "He escaped three years ago. He should have stayed in prison for the next ten years. It's a pity he's dead. He was not so bad!"

Marching fast they went two miles, the distance between the hut and the Lord's house.

At the gate they saw the Lord.

"Welcome, gentlemen. Please, come in. I've been waiting for you. We will not need those soldiers, especially so well-armed. I am in charge here and since yesterday my life—even so miserable—has lost any sense. I'm crying over my wife's death, detective. Recent events shortened her life . . . She passed away in the morning. She was an unhappy woman, cursed in her life."

Everybody entered the library in silence.

"Give up the fugitives from the Larkmoor prison whom you have been hiding, please," said the commander after a while.

"One is dead—Mr. Topkins. The others have escaped. I haven't tried to stop them. They have already paid with their blood for freedom. Only . . ."

The Lord opened the door to another room.

They saw Robert Riderswood tied to a chair. He was moving agressively, trying to free himself.

"Al Shuwalow! We've got him finally! He has a life sentence!"

"Except for this man there is also Miss Winsham and Miss Addison in the house."

"Your daughter, my Lord!" said Dickson.

The old man sighed with pain.

"So this you know already, too. I will not have to give you all the explanations, so unpleasant for me as a father."

"Your daughter can be cured."

"No!" Shuwalow cried. "No! She will be a vampire. She will be sucking people's blood. Just like Natasha Diershwin! Yes! Yes!"

Shuwalow kept shouting. "She was beautiful but bloodthirsty . . . She died from your bullet, Harry Dickson. And I will die too but before that I will tell you that I hate you all!"

"Take him away!" the commander ordered.

There was silence in the library. They heard only the sound of the clock. The detective and his friends were thinking about the strange fate of Lord Riderswood, who had fallen in love with the beautiful Natasha.

"Could we see her?"

The Lord nodded his head.

Dickson was for the first time in this part of the castle. Up to now he had been able to enter the dining room and the library only.

The Lord led the detectives along a dark corridor and then to a bedroom.

Tom Wills and Goldfield shouted with surprise when they saw the room. It looked like the laboratory of an alchemist.

Next to the window there was a huge telescope. A special hole in the glass made it possible to place it in such a way that the whole neighbourhood could easily be seen through it.

"I wanted to explain all the secrets to you. That's why I brought you to this room first. I was living all the time with the worry that somebody would discover my secret and that my love for my poor wife would no longer be known only to me and other people living in this house. So, every day I observed the roads around my land looking for soldiers from Larkmoor or any policemen."

"And if you saw them?" Dickson asked the Lord. "What then?"

"Then," said the Lord putting down his head, "then I would have killed myself, but first of all I would have killed my wife. That was my decision."

"And today?" said Goldfield.

"Today, when Nelly is dead, I could let the police into my house. I don't care about myself."

Dickson took a look around this strange room. He could see thick volumes of books on several shelves and an old-fashioned desk.

"Are you thinking about these books?" the Lord said. "These are

"I wanted to explain all the secrets to you. That's why I brought you to this room first."

scientific works about psychology. Till the end of my wife's life I had not lost the hope that one day I would be able to cure her. There is not a single book concerning her illness that I don't know. I know foreign languages. I was in touch with several big bookshops which sent me any new publications. I believe that today I could become one of the leading experts in this field . . . But now this whole knowledge is useless. The person for whom I gained it is dead."

The Lord stopped talking. A huge tear ran down his cheek.

Dickson, Inspector Goldfield and Tom Wills were silent, too.

Eventually, the Lord spoke:

"I used this telescope to see if anybody is coming to discover the secret of my life. Now, could you follow me to the room opposite?"

They crossed the corridor and entered a room overlooking the park.

There was another telescope, even bigger than the previous one.

Dickson came closer to the window.

He could see the whole park very well because the house was situated on the hill. Right in front there was the pond and behind it the marsh.

"Can you see anything on the horizon? A small black spot?"

The Lord also approached the window and pointed his finger at something far away beyond the swamps.

Dickson had good eyesight but he couldn't see anything.

Tom Wills came closer, too. His young eyes didn't let him down:

"I can see some building I guess . . ."

"It must be the prison in Larkmoor," said Goldfield.

"That's correct," the Lord confirmed. "Look through the telescope."

Dickson followed his suggestion.

He noticed the building without any problem. He was even able to say where the guards were.

What's more, every detail of the swamps was perfectly visible.

"Do you know why I needed this telescope?"

"I guess so . . . You were looking through it for fugitives. And then you let them stay in your house."

The Lord didn't answer.

They left the room and walked again along the dark corridor.

"For the first time in thirty years a stranger is entering this room," the Lord said. "For the first time my secrets will be discovered. In this house there are many unbelievable things, this room is incredible, too."

Saying this he pushed open a heavy door.

They could smell the stink of dogs. There were only two coops inside, one big and the other a lot smaller.

In a minute a small wolf puppy, completely red, appeared and came closer to the visitors.

"We feed him with milk from a bottle. It's a puppy of Lakme, the wolf which you have also killed."

Dickson bent over the puppy but it showed its white teeth and growled. The detective caught its mouth, played with it for a while and asked the Lord:

"Why did everybody think that killing the wolf was so horrifying? I saved Hugo's life."

"Lakme was Nelly's favourite animal. She could bite it and suck its blood. The wolf was used to it."

The little wolf was moving next to the Lord's feet. He picked it up and petted it. Then he came to a rope hanging on the wall and pulled it. The sound of a bell was heard.

After a while Soames entered the wolf's room. He was surprised by the presence of strangers. But then he realised that since Nelly's death a lot had changed.

"Soames," said the Lord, "promise me that you will take care of this little puppy. It's the only thing that my wife and your sister has left for us."

The servant took the animal from him.

"Yes, I will remember . . ."

He turned round and went to the door.

They passed a few other rooms and then came into a hall decorated with candles and flowers. On a big bed they saw the body of a giant but extremely beautiful woman.

"Poor Natasha," Gildfield sighed.

They were standing in silence, everybody was thinking about the poor woman and the old man who had fallen in love with her many years ago.

Suddenly, they heard some footsteps and the door opened. Miss Louise came in. In her eyes they could see something desperate, wild and terrifying.

She noticed the strangers and her father. She wanted to run closer to him but stopped and looked around . . . She started changing. Her face became wrinkled, her teeth grew and she growled.

She stood still for a moment as if hesitating what to do, as if fighting with herself inside. She wanted to kill this awful instinct which she had taken after her mother . . . She calmed down and looked at Dickson. She pointed at him and said:

"That's him! It's all his fault! He killed Lakme. I saw blood and I jumped into it. And now this instinct has awakened in me!"

The Lord approached his daughter and started talking to her very slowly:

"Don't cry," he said, "don't cry . . . A lot will change now. Now you'll be able to live like other people. You'll go to London . . ."

"No! I don't want to! I'm afraid of people, father! I'm afraid of myself!"

She burst into tears again and fell down next to her mother's body.

Dickson spoke to the Lord:

"Let her cry."

They went out of the room.

"That is all that I wanted to tell you," said the Lord. "I have told you all my secrets. I haven't hidden anything. My poor

Nelly . . . She was a good wife. And till the end of her life she was as beautiful as on the day I met her. I loved her despite her illness."

The Lord became quiet. He was walking slowly along the corridor.

"I do not regret anything, gentlemen. And I'm not afraid of justice."

He said so and without saying good-bye he went out of the house and headed for the park.

Nobody even tried to stop him . . . There was an enormous strength in the man who was leaving.

●●●

The owner of the inn served them tea and cognac.

It was raining outside. The wind was blowing outside the windows.

"Goldfield," said Dickson, "you have the right to criticise me. I didn't check the registry books when I came to this town. This mistake could have led to my death but fortunately you and Tom came in time. I understood everything when I saw in the books that Natasha Diershwin had married Lord Riderswood."

"Who is she? What was her real name?"

Tom didn't understand anything.

"It happened probably thirty years ago," Goldfield replied. "She was performing in a circus as a wolf tamer. She was over seven feet tall and had a beautiful voice. She ate only fresh meat and fresh blood. Her name was Natasha—Natalie, in English Nelly. She had another nickname, too—the woman vampire. She was Russian."

"And Lord Riderswood," Dickson continued, "fell in love with her. He didn't hesitate and married her. But he realised he had

to stop contacting any members of his family and change his life completely. And so he did. He lived alone, only with his wife, in his house on the marsh, which was surrounded by a high wall built by his father to protect himself against the fugitives from Larkmoor. Here his daughter Louise was born."

Dickson stopped for a moment and drank some coffee.

"The Lord was hoping," Goldfield continued, "that he would be able to cure his wife's awful illness. Unfortunately . . . She drank the blood of her wolves but with time it wasn't enough. She wanted . . . human blood."

"That is correct," Dickson confirmed. "The Lord didn't know what to do with the vampire which his wife had become. An accident helped him. He found a fugitive from Larkmoor in his park and let him stay in his house. He kept the first one, the second, the third under one condition—they had to give their blood to Nelly. That's why Hugo, Michael and Robert had to wear those high collars."

"Hugo, Michael and Robert? Aren't they the Lord's sons?"

"He only referred to them as sons. Al Shuwalow blackmailed him and forced the Lord to introduce him as his son. Robert Riderswood or actually Al Shuwalow had enormous ambitions. He wanted to take over the property of the Riderswoods by marrying the Lord's daughter Louise. He was the one who killed or sent to the vampire anybody who fell in love with the girl."

"But the Lord cooperated with him. How can you explain that?"

"He did it because he realised that his daughter had the same illness as her mother. He didn't want anybody to marry her. He didn't want to have grandchildren who would also be monsters drinking human blood."

"That's horrible," Tom remarked.

"I just don't understand what role Wardleton had in the whole story? He moved out from this area a long time ago."

"There is some evidence which suggests that he was helping people to escape from the prison in Larkmoor. He helped Shuwalow too, who later blackmailed him and perhaps even killed him. From that moment Al pretended to be the middleman for the fugitives but in reality whenever they came to his hut, they became the source of blood for Natasha. When the guests became too interested in Louise, Al brought them to the hut and killed them, too."

"The Lord also sent me to Wardleton," Dickson continued, "when Robert was ill, to give me a chance to escape."

"And one more thing. Why were you closed in the house with bars in the windows?" asked Tom Wills.

"I believe that it was Robert's idea. He ordered Soames to take me there when he realised that the Lord wanted to help me."

"Well, so the whole mystery is solved now. None of those people living in the house wanted to tell anybody about the secret because they would have to return to Larkmoor."

"That is true. Only Michael was tired of the situation and he was the one who wrote the letter to me."

EXERCISES

Part 1: Comprehension

Put the events listed below in the right order according to the story presented in the book:

a. ● Dickson went to Norwich, rented a taxi and arrived at the Riderswoods' property.

b. ● Dickson hunted and wanted to give his prey to somebody but when a visit to Mr. Wardleton was suggested, Michael came to warn him.

c. ● Dickson was woken up at night by noises made by a stranger in his room.

d. ● Dickson was kept as a prisoner in the guesthouse in the park.

e. ● Dickson received a letter from Robert Riderswood.

f. ● Dickson escaped from the Riderswoods' property and followed Robert to Mr. Wardleton's house.

g. ● Dickson killed the red wolf and shot at Soames.

h. ● Dickson sat in the Two Crosses Inn and explained the whole mystery to his friends.

i. ● Dickson spoke to the Lord and was allowed to stay in the castle.

j. ● Miss Addison visited the detective and together they ran away to join Hugo and Michael who were preparing an escape.

k. ● Dickson had a secret talk with Michael Riderswood in the dining room.

l. ● Dickson called the Larkmoor prison head and arranged for a group of soldiers to come on the next day to help him.

m. ● Dickson met other people living in the Lord's house and talked about hunting.

n. ● Dickson questioned the inn owner and solved the mystery.

o. ● Dickson with his friends and soldiers went to the Lord's house and found out the details of the whole story.

p. ● Dickson freed Topkins, ran through the marsh followed by somebody who wanted to kill him and was found by Tom Wills and Inspector Goldfield.

Part 2: Grammar

Task 1:

Complete the sentences with the following words: *another, other, the other, the others.*

1. All of the members of the Riderswood family have been strange for generations. The present owner is no different from ..... .

2. During dinner I will introduce you to ..... members of my family.

3. I will keep the cigarette for later and smoke it in the evening when ..... can't see me.

4. When the host ordered wine, all the members of his family looked at one ..... rather surprised.

5. I still have one more bottle and, if necessary, I will buy ..... one in the inn in Bolton.

6. You will have to go to the prison which is situated on ..... side of the swamps.

7. Dickson recognised the voice. It was Tom Wills. They greeted each ..... .

8. In the next room there was ..... telescope, even bigger than the previous one.

9. There were only two coops inside, one big and ..... a lot smaller.

10. They passed a few ..... rooms and then came into a hall decorated with candles and flowers.

Task 2: Put in the missing prepositions.

1. He packed his suitcase and left ..... Norwich.

2. The wall reminded him ..... the Santé prison walls in Paris.

3. I've seen you ..... thousands of photographs.

4. All the looks directed ..... Dickson were more curious than friendly.

5. I'm disgusted ..... hunting.

6. I do not approve ..... killing animals.

7. I'm warning you ..... him.

8. He took out ..... his pocket something which looked like a cigarette lighter.

9. I worry ..... you—you must escape!

10. You should thank me that I pointed my pistol ..... your arm.

Task 3:
Complete the phrasal verbs in the following sentences with prepositions:

1. I hope you have come ..... with some explanation because my father has already seen you.

2. What are you looking ..... in my house?

3. He was preparing for adventures like a hunter setting ..... for the chase.

4. I hope he is not going to find ..... that I have been here.

5. He pressed a button on the lighter and suddenly the lid came ..... presenting a set of bullets underneath.

6. He had even sawed through the bars in order to be able to go out through the window if it turned ..... to be necessary.

7. Thick books were brought and put on the table. Dickson looked ..... their yellowed pages.

8. Tom Wills came closer to the telescope, too. His young eyes didn't let him ..... and he could see the prison building.

9. She calmed ..... , stopped crying and looked at Wills.

10. Al wanted to take ..... the Riderswoods' property by marrying Miss Louise.

Task 4:

Put the verbs in brackets in the correct form: Past Simple, Past Continuous or Past Perfect.

1. The car (move)..... fast along the road while Dickson (think)..... about the

content of the letter.

2. Tell my father and brothers that we (meet)..... in front of the house and that you (come).....

..... here all by youself, please.

3. Somebody (sing)..... but the melody (stop)..... as unexpectedly as it (begin)..... ..... .

4. He (be)..... sure that somebody (dig)..... under his window.

5. Dickson (take)..... a look at his suitcase and (realise)..... that somebody (search) ..... it.

6. He (remember)..... that he (close)..... the window before going to sleep.

7. The head of the red dog which (try)..... to get into his room on the first night in the castle (appear)..... from the water.

8. They (stand)..... in silence. Everybody was thinking about the poor woman and the old man who (fall)..... in love with her so many years ago.

9. She (want)..... to kill this awful instinct which she (take)..... after her mother.

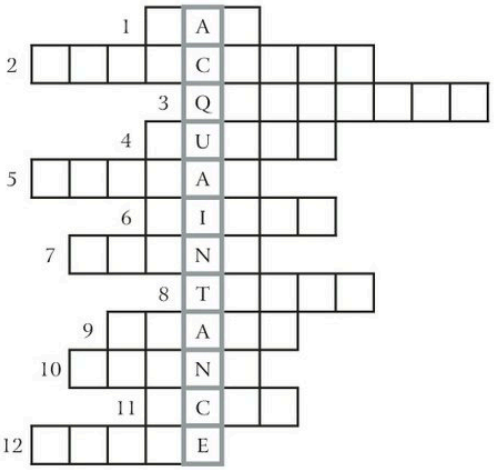
10. The Lord (not know)..... what to do with the vampire which his wife (become)..... .

Part 3: Vocabulary

Task 1:

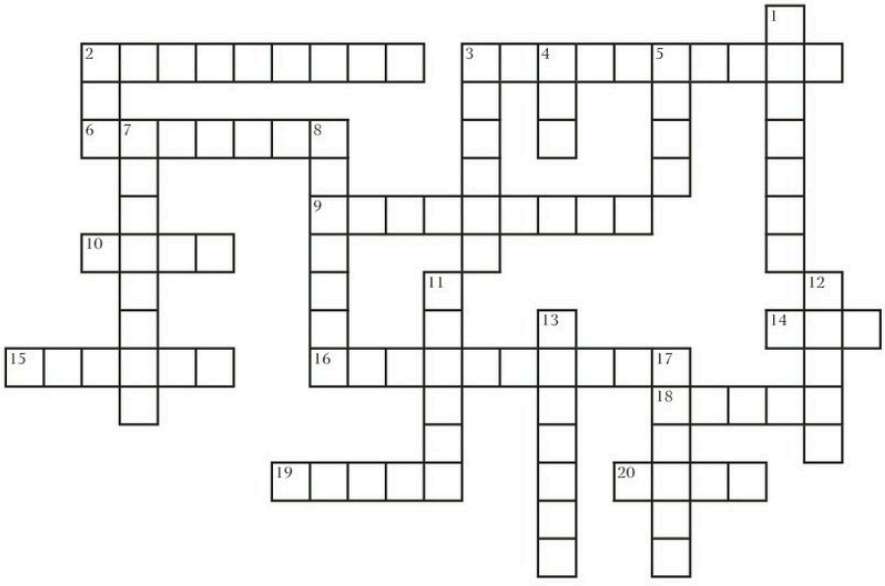
Read the clues below and complete the crossword. All the words are **nouns**.

1. a short sleep which you can have during the day
2. a pair of metal rings which policemen can put on the hands of a prisoner
3. a sentence which you should answer
4. a word or phrase expressing your wish that something terrible will happen to somebody
5. the part of a shirt around your neck
6. a long gun which you use for shooting animals
7. a piece of material which you pull down to cover windows
8. a small electric light which you can carry in your hand
9. an area of soft wet land
10. an injury to a part of your body usually received in fighting
11. a mark on your skin which is caused by a wound
12. the act of following somebody in order to catch him



Task 2:

Read the clues below and complete the crossword. All the words are **verbs**.



Across:

2. force somebody to do something for you or you will tell their secret to everybody
3. understand the value of something or be grateful for something
6. speak very quietly to somebody
9. go with somebody somewhere
10. let out a long deep breath which shows that you are sad
14. move your hand backwards and forwards on a surface pressing it at the same time
15. walk quietly on the tips of your toes

16. make something seem larger or better than it really is
18. raise your shoulders showing that you don't know
19. past form of the verb *to spill*
20. became lighter in colour

Down:

1. hit something when you are walking and almost fall over
2. bend your head forward as a sign of respect
3. believe that something is true even though you have no evidence
4. touch an animal with affection
5. make somebody healthy again
7. pause before you do something usually because you are not sure
8. begin to understand that something is true
11. wish that you had not done something
12. give an opinion about something
13. shake because you are cold or afraid of something
17. run away from a place where you don't want to be

Solutions

Part 1:

e a i m c k b d j g f p n l o h

Part 2:

Task 1:

1. the others 2. the other 3. the others 4. another 5. another
6. the other 7. other 8. another 9. the other 10. other

Task 2:

1. for 2. of 3. in 4. at 5. by 6. of 7. against 8. of 9. about 10. at

Task 3:

1. up 2. for 3. off 4. out 5. off 6. out 7. through 8. down 9. down 10. over

Task 4:

1. was moving, was thinking 2. met, came 3. was singing, stopped, had begun
4. was, was digging 5. took, realised, had searched 6. remembered, had closed
7. had tried, appeared 8. were standing, had fallen 9. wanted, had taken
10. didn't know, had become

Part 3:

Task 1:

1. nap 2. handcuffs 3. question 4. curse 5. collar 6. rifle
7. blind 8. torch 9. swamp 10. wound 11. scar 12. chase

Task 2:

Across:
2. BLACKMAIL 3. APPRECIATE 6. WHISPER 9. ACCOMPANY 10. SIGH 14. RUB 15. TIPTOE
16. EXAGGERATE 18. SHRUG 19. SPILT 20. FADE

Down:
1. STUMBLE 2. BOW 3. ASSUME 4. PET 5. CURE 7. HESITATE 8. REALISE 11. REGRET
12. JUDGE 13. TREMBLE 17. ESCAPE

Esq. Esquire, used when you're writing a man's name and address on an envelope (formal, old-fashioned)

Medieval Era an epoch in history, culture and literature

grog an alcoholic drink made of rum and hot water with sugar

beg błagać
curse klątwa, przekleństwo
solve rozwiązać
mystery tajemnica
save ocalić
receive otrzymać
exhausting wyczerpujący
matter sprawa
Norwich a town in eastern England
property *tu*: nieruchomość
Wash area in the central part of eastern England
swamp mokradła
landowner właściciel ziemski
gloomy ponury
inn gospoda, zajazd
nod skinąć
take a nap zdrzemnąć się (*nap* drzemka)
plain gładki
entrance wejście
indeed faktycznie
despite pomimo
gate brama
fortress forteca, twierdza

reply odpowiedzieć
regret żałować
since *tu*: ponieważ
enormously niezwykle

bent zgarbiony
slim szczupły
skinny chudy
casually swobodnie (o ubiorze)
mention wspomnieć
interrupt przerwać
reason *tu*: powód
amazement zdumienie
enter wejść do
surround otaczać
fade wyblaknąć
lawn trawnik
meadow łąka
ugly brzydki
come up with wpaść na (pomysł)
become silent zamilknąć
beard broda
appear pojawić się
have the honour mieć zaszczyt
self-confident pewny siebie
anger gniew
host gospodarz
be all ears zamieniać się w słuch
require wymagać
national security bezpieczeństwo narodowe
object mieć obiekcje, sprzeciwić się

servant służący
rope sznur, lina

old-fashioned staroświecki
pale blady
assist pomagać
bow ukłonić się
upstairs na górę, na piętro
wing skrzydło
pond staw
reed trzcina
bank *tu*: brzeg
above ponad
count on liczyć na

touched wzruszony
refresh oneself *tu*: ogarnąć się
narrow wąski
actually tak naprawdę
sculpture rzeźba
mood nastrój
set off wyruszać
chase pościg
silence cisza
longing tęsknota
unexpectedly nieoczekiwanie
straighten up *tu*: poprawić
chandeliers kandelabr
prove *tu*: świadczyć
niece siostrzenica
governess guwernantka
curious ciekawski

notice zauważyć

the way spinsters do tak jak to bywa w przypadku starych panien

truly prawdziwie

teetotaler abstynent

step out wyjść

pheasant bażant

partridge kuropatwa

obey przestrzegać

be disgusted by brzydzić się

shrug one's shoulders wzruszyć ramionami

exaggerate przesadzać

accompany towarzyszyć

rifle strzelba

at least przynajmniej

incredible niesamowity

impact wrażenie

tremble trząść się

calm down uspokoić się

forgive (forgave, forgiven) wybaczyć

unbearable nie do zniesienia

therefore dlatego

stay up przesiadywać do późna

slighty rudely prawie niegrzecznie

light (lit, lit) zapalić

blow (blew, blown) wiać

knock pukać

embarrassed zawstydzony

pour wlać

glow błyszczeć
forbid (forbade, forbidden) zabronić
improbable nieprawdopodobny
if necessary o ile to konieczne
we are not allowed nie wolno nam (*allow* pozwalać)
whisper szeptać
shrink (shrank, shrunk) kurczyć
się
tiptoe iść na palcach
court starać się o rękę
sneak out wymknąć się
realise zdawać sobie sprawę
immediately od razu
search przeszukiwać
hide (hid, hidden) ukryć
maid pokojówka
bang walić
snort parskać
dig (dug, dug) kopać
place umieścić
meanwhile tymczasem
lean out wychylić się
furious wściekły
growl warczeć
sniff wąchać
claim twierdzić
loaded naładowany
gentle delikatny
gust podmuch

though *tu*: jednak
flap łopotać
blind roleta
slippers kapcie, ranne pantofle
marble marmurowy
reach out wyciągnąć, sięgnąć
horrible straszny, okropny
howl wyć
suspicion podejrzenie
meaningfully porozumiewawczo
put an end to położyć kres
event wydarzenie
remain zostać
unbuttoned rozpięty
collar kołnierzyk
neck szyja
chest klatka piersiowa
scar blizna
beast bestia
awful straszny
wound rana
definitely zdecydowanie
lose (lost, lost) zgubić, stracić
at first na początku, najpierw
cause przyczyna
sense *tu*: rozum
force zmusić
trust ufać
unsuitable nieodpowiedni, niewłaściwy

so far jak narazie
rise (rose, risen) wstać
jealousy zazdrość
deny zaprzeczyć
proof dowód
circumstances okoliczności
fall in love zakochać się
at first sight od pierwszego wejrzenia
point to wskazać
cunning sprytny
prisoner więzień
prey zdobycz
keep in touch pozostawać w kontakcie
anyway zresztą, tak czy inaczej
in order to w celu
regards pozdrowienia
gift prezent
sincere szczery
at one's expense czyimś kosztem
condemn potępiać
tear łza
regain odzyskać
silent milczący, cichy
proud dumny
exchange zamienić
have anything to do mieć
cokolwiek wspólnego
for goodness' sake na miłość boską
backwards do tyłu

strike (struck, struck) uderzać (*was struck by* uderzyło go)
permission pozwolenie
find out dowiedzieć się
be supposed mieć (coś zrobić)
let out wypuścić
escape uciec
irritated rozdrażniony, poirytowany
curl pukiel
couldn't belive his ears nie wierzyć własnym uszom
luggage bagaż
inside od środka, do wnętrza
belongings rzeczy osobiste
compromise *tu*: skompromitować
judge ocenić
properly właściwie, należycie
give up *tu*: zrezygnować
halfway through w pół drogi
all by himself zupełnie sam
laid nakryty
deliver dostarczać
assume przyjąć, założyć
fulfil spełniać
request prośba
weapon broń
prison guard strażnik więzienny
to be more precise dokładnie mówiąc
for the time being na jakiś czas
give in poddać się

aware świadomy
deprive pozbawiać
prosecuted ścigany sądownie
burst into laughter wybuchnąć śmiechem
bullet pocisk, nabój
miss *tu*: przegapić
appreciation uznanie
furnished umeblowany
pleased with zadowolony z
bars kraty
remind przypominać
cigarette lighter zapalniczka
button guzik
lid wieko
set zestaw, komplet
underneath pod spodem
fountain pen wieczne pióro
file pilnik
steel stal
housekeeper gospodyni
pick up the phone odebrać telefon
hang up odłożyć słuchawkę
pudding *tu*: deser
sharply ostro
caller rozmówca, osoba dzwoniąca
as well *tu*: także
interrupt przerwać
hesitate wahać się
phone call rozmowa telefoniczna

make an appointment umówić się na spotkanie
intriguing intrygujący
acquaintance znajomy
rub pocierać
chin podbródek
conclusion wniosek
remark zauważyć
clever bystry, mądry
precious cenny
on one's behalf w czyimś imieniu
patiently cierpliwie
spotlight reflektor
saw (sawed, sawed/sawn) piłować
turn out okazać się
careful *tu*: staranny
surprisingly zaskakująco
polite grzeczny, uprzejmy
shadow cień
sacrifice poświęcenie
brave dzielny, odważny
admiration podziw
we don't have a minute to spare nie mamy chwili do stracenia
Look out! uważaj
wave zamachać
keep one's balance utrzymać równowagę
oar wiosło

invisible niewidzialny
attempt próba
bloodthirsty żądny krwi
take a swing wziąć zamach, zamachnąć się
miss *tu*: nie trafić, nie wcelować
rock kołysać się
drop upuścić
terrified przerażony
fangs kły
spill (spilt, spilt) rozlać
leave alone zostawić w spokoju
nightmare koszmar
withdraw (withdrew, withdrawn) wycofać się
disobey być nieposłusznym
approach podejść (do)
club maczuga
entitled uprawniony
hell piekło
carriage powóz
hedge żywopłot
tracks ślady
neigh rżeć
hut chata
for sure z pewnością
access dostęp
creak skrzypieć
mercy litość
imprison uwięzić

set free uwolnić
basement piwnica
torch latarka
handcuffs kajdanki
wrist nadgarstek
pay attention zwracać uwagę
concern dotyczyć
bleed (bled, bled) krwawić
mumble mamrotać pod nosem
do one's best zrobić wszystko, co w czyjejś mocy
grab złapać
impression wrażenie
fog mgła
stumble potykać się
beam promień
make up one's mind zdecydować się
confidently pewnie
stand still nie ruszać się
shake somebody's hand uścisnąć komuś rękę
recover przyjść do siebie
registry books księgi metrykalne
registrar przechowywanie dokumentów w Wielkiej Brytanii
frown marszczyć brwi
numerous liczny
fugitive zbieg
failure porażka
armed uzbrojony
report to zameldować się u

miserable nędzny
pass away umrzeć
give up *tu*: wydać
tie przywiązać
sigh wzdychać
cure leczyć
suck ssać
fate los
volume tom
field *tu*: dziedzina
gain uzyskać
cheek policzek
spot plamka
eyesight wzrok
let down zawiesić
confirm potwierdzić
unbelievable niesamowity, niewiarygodny
stink smród
coop kojec
pet głaskać, pieścić
wrinkled pomarszczony
take after odziedziczyć cechy wyglądu lub charakteru
awaken obudzić się
justice sprawiedliwość
head for udać się do
tamer treser
refer to *tu*: określać
blackmail szantażować
evidence dowód

middleman pośrednik